



Connecticut Veterans

Chamber of Commerce

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Testimony of Michael J. Zacchea

Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce

In support of Senate Bill 315, An Act Concerning

Distinction for School Districts That Provide Exemplary Veteran Education Programs

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Education Committee

The Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce is a nonpartisan, nonprofit association that represents veteran-owned businesses and military veterans seeking to reintegrate into civilian life. The Chamber brings the veteran and civilian communities together to promote economic growth and development and reduce barriers to business and workforce entry.

I am also an appointee to the Small Business Administration Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs.

The Chamber supports making an award of distinction for those school districts and boards of education that include opportunities to learn about veterans' contributions to our state and country. Representatives of the Chamber have met separately with staff and officials of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and the Connecticut State Department of Education concerning proposed legislation that would require the state Board of Education to assist and encourage local and regional boards to include information about veterans in public school curriculum, including the role and importance of veterans to securing and maintaining freedom and their contributions to society. Both organizations are generally supportive of the Chamber's initiative, and we would like to continue to work cooperatively with them and the Education Committee to move the discussion forward.

There are approximately 22 million veterans in our country, or about 6% of the total population. A survey conducted in 2010 by the Coalition of Iraq and Veterans service organizations found that 75% of Americans don't know anyone who has served in the military!

Connecticut is home to approximately 220,000 veterans, about 1% of the total national population of veterans. About 45% of our veterans are between the ages of 22 to 65. By 2021, approximately 1.25 million combat veterans will be leaving active service; approximately 1% of that number should return to our state. According to the 2012 US Census Bureau Survey of Business Owners published in August 2015, our state is home to more than 31,000 fully-owned

Veteran-owned businesses, and more than 11,000 part-Veteran-owned businesses; of which, more than 12,000 are payroll employers, employing nearly 40,000 total employees; contributing more than \$20 billion in state gross product to our economy. Veterans are an integral part of our state's economy and workforce, and an integral part of our communities. Veterans who experience successful reintegration into our communities create economic, social, and political capital that benefits everyone.

Many school districts remain in session on Nov 11th, Veterans Day. It has become an important part of many schools to invite veterans to speak to their students on Veterans Day. Often, schools will include requests for family veteran status on enrollment forms, or other parental communications, and inquiries about whether a veteran would be willing to speak.

There are several "teachable" opportunities with regard to veterans in Connecticut. One organization that has a curriculum for veterans to speak to schools is the Education Connection based in Litchfield. It offers a course called "Preserving Our Histories of Connecticut Veterans", for which students interview several veterans, and make a documentary about them that is then entered into the Student Film Festival in Waterbury. There is no reason why this or a similar program or project couldn't be exported to other districts. Every year, the Department of Veterans' Affairs inducts several veterans into the State Veterans Hall of Fame – that occasion and those veterans so recognized seem like ideal subjects for such a project. Every year, there is a major Veterans Parade in Hartford, the largest in New England, and 6th largest in the country. The parade organization includes an essay contest about veterans with several cash scholarships awarded. The parade also recognizes several parade marshals who are veterans with distinguished service records. Finally, our state has many fine non-profit veterans' service organizations that do great work in our communities.

The value of this proposed legislation is not just for the students; it is for the veterans in the community as well. Many veterans are motivated to speak to students about their experiences in the military, or about traveling abroad. It is also an opportunity for veterans to get involved in their community, to get woven into the life of the community.

Our vision is to make Connecticut a peer leader among the states in creating solutions for veteran reintegration into our communities. We believe it is important and adds value to the education of our students, to introduce them to veterans who live in their communities.

Please contact Andrew DiSilvestro Jr., Executive Vice President of the Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce, for any questions or additional information, at (860) 874-5251.